**Active Recovery**

**Low intensity exercise may be better than complete rest after competition**

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After athletic competition or a hard workout, it would seem that complete rest would be the best way to encourage recovery. However, research is beginning to find some advantages in active recovery. Active recovery refers to engaging in low-intensity exercise after workouts. There are two forms of active recovery. One is during the cool-down phase immediately after a hard effort or workout. The second form of active recovery includes the days following a competition or other intense workout. Research is growing on the benefits of both types of active recovery.

One study published in *Medicine & Science in Sports and Exercise* (1) found that active recovery immediately after the event encourages recovery and reduces muscle lactate levels faster than complete rest. After hard intervals, one group rested completely while a second group exercised at 30 percent intensity between intervals. The active group reduced blood lactate levels faster and could achieve a higher power output throughout the workout.

Another study (2) found that adding low intensity exercise to the rest period after competition did not decrease an athlete's physical recovery and actually had positive effects on psychological recovery by improving relaxation.

A third study found active recovery encouraged lactic acid removal and and helped speed recovery. (3) The general theory is that low-intensity activity assists blood circulation which, in turn, helps remove lactic acid from the muscle. Low-intensity active recovery appears to significantly reduce accumulated blood lactate and speed muscle recovery. However, all agree that more study is necessary to establish a clear answer regarding the best way to recover from intense exercise.

**The Bottom Line**   
Active rest appears to allow an athlete to physically and psychologically recover from the stresses of training and competing while still maintaining fitness levels. It is becoming a common part of most training plans and appears to offer more benefit than harm. Consider adding a bit of easy, low-intensity exercise to your post-competition recovery plan and see if you feel better faster.